



On Becoming a Leader – Quotes & Thoughts

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Introduction

The New Economy was fueled by intellectual capital, as the economy of the twenty-first century will be. The days when a company's most important assets are buildings and equipment are gone forever. Ideas are now the acknowledged engine and currency of the global economy. For leaders, and would-be geoning underclass that lacks hope and health insurance. The rise of the middle class was the great economic success story of the second half of the twentieth century. The disappearance of that middle class, made up of people who had come to believe that loyalty and hard work would bring security and a comfortable standard of living, may well turn out to be the most important economic story of the new century. And unless the current trend toward more and more wealth in fewer and fewer hands is reversed, it could be a very grim story indeed.

come clear to you since we last met?" One thing that has become clearer than ever to me is that integrity is the most important characteristic of a leader, and one that he or she must be prepared to demonstrate again and again. Too many leaders—cor-

One of the most important things that Sidney, like all great leaders, does is to cultivate a culture of candor. I had been writing about leadership for many years before it struck me that there was a vital aspect of any organization's success that had been overlooked—not great leadership, but great followership.

dangerous car and truck models is an egregious example. But authentic leaders embrace those who speak valuable truths, however hard they are to hear. Nothing will sink a leader faster than surrounding him- or herself with yes-men and women. Even

like artists, as solitary geniuses. In fact, the days when a single individual, however gifted, can solve our problems are long gone. The problems we face today come at us so fast and are so complex, that we need groups of talented people to tackle them, led by gifted leaders, or even teams of leaders. As co-author Patricia

Secrets of Creative Collaboration, “The Lone Ranger is dead.” In order to lead a Great Group, a leader need not possess all the individual skills of the group members. What he or she must have are vision, the ability to rally the others, and integrity. Such leaders also need superb curatorial and coaching skills—an eye for talent, the ability to recognize correct choices, contagious optimism, a gift for bringing out the best in others, the ability to facilitate communication and mediate conflict, a sense of fairness, and, as always, the kind of authenticity and integrity that creates trust. Nothing about the world today is simpler than it was or slower than it was, which makes the ability to collaborate and facilitate great collaboration more vital than ever.

relatively painless experience such as being mentored. The individual brings certain attributes into the crucible and emerges with new, improved leadership skills. Whatever is thrown at them, leaders emerge from their crucibles stronger and unbroken. No matter how cruel the testing, they become more optimistic and more open to experience. They don’t lose hope or succumb to

In addition to the qualities I describe in *On Becoming a Leader*, all leaders have four essential competencies. First, they are able to engage others by creating shared meaning. They have a vision, and they can persuade others to make that vision

Second, all authentic leaders have a distinctive voice. By voice, I mean a cluster of things—a purpose, self-confidence, and a sense of self, and the whole gestalt of abilities that, thanks to Daniel Goleman, we now call Emotional Intelligence. Voice is hard to define but terribly important. One of

The third quality that all true leaders have is integrity. Recently, we have been reminded how important integrity is because we have perceived its lack in so many corporate leaders—the corporate weasels, as they have been called. One component of integrity is a strong moral compass. It need not be religious faith, but it is a

But the one competence that I now realize is absolutely essential for leaders—the key competence—is adaptive capacity. Adaptive capacity is what allows leaders to respond quickly and intelligently to relentless change. A whole new decision-making process has evolved in the last thirteen years in response to a changed context. As psychologist Karl Weick so eloquently writes, leaders of the old school could rely on maps.

before all the data are in. They must assess the results of their actions, correct their course, and quickly act again.

Adaptive capacity is made up of many things, including resilience or what psychologists call “hardiness.” People who are able to act quickly and appropriately are all “first-class noticers,” as novelist Saul Bellow describes one of his characters. Adaptive capacity is a kind of creativity. And adaptive capacity also encompasses the ability to identify and seize opportunities.

Timeless leadership is always about character, and it is always about authenticity. Let me underscore the observation made by pioneering psychologist William James about authenticity. “I have often thought,” he wrote, “that the best way to define a

The study of leadership isn’t nearly as exact as, say, the study of chemistry. For one thing, the social world isn’t nearly as orderly as the physical world, nor is it as susceptible to rules. For

But since leadership, by definition, cannot take place in a vacuum, I’ve begun with the current context—the myriad

On Becoming a Leader is based on the assumption that leaders are people who are able to express themselves fully. By this I mean that they know who they are, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and how to fully deploy their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses. They also know what they want, why they want it, and how to communicate what they want to others, in order to gain their cooperation and support. Finally, they know how to achieve their goals. The key to full self-expression is understanding one's self and the world, and the key to understanding is learning—from one's own life and experience.

Mastering the Context

One person can live on a desert island without leadership. Two people, if they're totally compatible, could probably get along and even progress. If there are three or more, someone has to take the lead. Today we have a more nuanced view of leadership. We no longer think in terms of the Lone Ranger or

through. Some members of the family board told Baxter that Ed was too tough, too rough on his fellow executives. They would not approve his appointment unless he improved his "people skills."

ambitious, but he was also a tyrant. He was impulsive and frequently abusive of people who worked for him. They would actually cower in his presence. He had a desperate need to control both people and events. He was incapable of thanking anyone for a job well done—he couldn't even give a compliment. And, of course, he was a sexist.

ascendancy now found new flaws. They argued that, for all his drive and competence, he lacked both vision and character.

Believing that character is as vital in a leader as drive and competence, I had to agree with them. And character was

When I sorted it out afterward, I realized that there were actually five things that the board was interested in: technical competence (which Ed had), people skills, conceptual skills

(meaning imagination and creativity), judgment and taste, and character. It wasn't just the people skills, as they had originally told me. So even when he worked hard to improve in that area, he simply could not get people on his side. They questioned his judgment and his character. And they felt that they couldn't trust him.

Understanding the Basics

- The manager administers; the leader innovates.
- The manager is a copy; the leader is an original.
- The manager maintains; the leader develops.
- The manager focuses on systems and structure; the leader focuses on people.
- The manager relies on control; the leader inspires trust.
- The manager has a short-range view; the leader has a long-range perspective.
- The manager asks how and when; the leader asks what and why.
- The manager has his or her eye always on the bottom line; the leader's eye is on the horizon.
- The manager imitates; the leader originates.
- The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it.
- The manager is the classic good soldier; the leader is his or her own person.
- The manager does things right; the leader does the right thing.

Knowing yourself

The managers Akin interviewed cited two basic motivations for learning. The first was a need to know, which they described, he said, “as rather like a thirst or hunger gnawing at them, sometimes dominating their attention until satisfied.” The second was “a sense of role,” which stems from “a person’s perception of the gap between what he or she is, and what he or she should be.”

or mastery of a discipline. It’s seeing the world simultaneously as it is and as it can be, understanding what you see, and acting on your understanding. Kaplan didn’t just study the movie busi-

Lesson Four: True Understanding Comes from Reflecting on Your Experience

In a sense, both schools justify removing responsibility for behavior from the individual, a new variation on the ancient Flip Wilson routine, “The devil made me do it!”

then forget. That is why true learning begins with unlearning—and why unlearning is one of the recurring themes of our story.

inquiry. . . . It is a grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty.”

Knowing the World

As I noted in the last chapter, leaders are made at least as much by their experiences and their understanding and application of their experiences as by any skills. Norman Lear told me of an experience he had when he was in the Air Force, sta-

America's automotive industry prospered on maintenance learning, until it suddenly found itself up against the wall, outdone and outsold by the Japanese automotive wizards, and learned by shock that it was in crisis. Detroit was bankrupt creatively and facing financial ruin, but instead of trying to think its way out of the dilemma, it ran on shock for years, closing down plants, throwing thousands of employees out of work, buying any solution that looked good. It wasn't until recently that Detroit truly began to examine and recover from its self-inflicted wounds, evidence of what the Club of Rome calls "innovative learning that may come too late."

- Anticipation: being active and imaginative rather than passive and habitual.
- Learning by listening to others.
- Participation: shaping events, rather than being shaped by them.

line. A study by the Carnegie Foundation shows that an increasing number of young people choose fields that promise to be instantly profitable, such as business, engineering, computer science, and health programs.

dangerous to their ambitions. Your intellectual life is really the ability to see how things can be different, and big institutions in society, whether public or private, often ask people to toe the line in any number of ways—personal, political, ideological.

makes me sad to see that. . . . People who go to plays, read books, know the classics, who have an open mind and enjoy experiences, are more apt to be successful in my business than someone with an MBA in finance."

wearing a beret is not necessarily being a critical learner. If you lose perspective on yourself and your own roots, you have merely put on the garb of another culture. You need to keep the sense of difference.

allied souls. I know of no leader in any era who hasn't had at least one mentor: teachers who found things in them they didn't know were there, parents or older siblings, senior asso-

but I don't see it as a failure. So it also wasn't a mistake. Mistakes aren't failures either, and I don't take them seriously. It's okay to make mistakes, as long as you make them in good conscience and you're doing the best you can at that moment. . . .

Operating on Instinct

organic, dynamic, whole, and ambiguous. They see relationships as linear, sequential and serial, discrete, singular and independent, when they are, in fact, parallel and simultaneous, connected, murky, multiple and interdependent. They are determinists, believers in cause-and-effect, when, in fact, probability is the rule and the inevitable hardly ever happens. They wear square hats, when they should try sombreros.

In any corporation, managers serve as the left brain and the research and development staff serves as the right brain, but the CEO must combine both, must have both administrative and imaginative gifts. One of the reasons that so few corporate exec-

As Apple CEO John Sculley encouraged diversity of opinion around him, and went with vision over market research. “One of the biggest mistakes a person can make is to put together a team that reflects only him. I find it’s better to put teams together of people who have different skills and then make all those disparate skills function together. The real role of the leader is to figure out how you make diverse people and elements work together.

As an academic administrator, Alfred Gottschalk looked for right-brain characteristics when he hired. “I first look for character, whether the individual can inspire trust. Then I look for imagination and perseverance, steadfastness of purpose. If, for

Deploying yourself: Strike Hard, Try Everything

Reflection is a major way in which leaders learn from the past.

ing. We have plenty of economists, and we have all the sciences covered, but only a handful of thinkers. So maybe that makes

The point of the first two tests is that once you recognize, or admit, that your primary goal is to fully express yourself, you will find the means to achieve the rest of your goals—given your abilities and capacities, along with your interests and biases. On the other hand, if your primary aim is to prove yourself, you’ll run into trouble sooner or later, as Ed, the lead character in the cautionary tale in chapter one, did. The man who follows his father into law or medicine in order to prove himself, or the woman who decides to be a stockbroker to show that she can make a lot of money, is playing the fool’s game and will almost inevitably fail and/or be unhappy.

Robert Dockson agreed: “Leaders aren’t technicians.”

Creativity is required, then, for the banker as well as the motion picture director. The creative process that underlies strategic thinking is infinitely complex, and as unexplainable finally as its inner mechanism, but there are basic steps in the process that can be identified. When you reduce something to its most elemental state, its nuclear core, you can generalize from there.

growth doesn’t have to stall, nor should it. Leaders differ from others in their constant appetite for knowledge and experience, and as their worlds widen and become more complex, so too do their means of understanding.

requires an entirely different set of skills. As I see it, leadership revolves around vision, ideas, direction, and has more to do with inspiring people as to direction and goals than with day-to-day implementation. . . . One can’t lead unless he can leverage more than his own capabilities. . . . You have to be capable of inspiring other people to do things without actually sitting on top of them with a checklist—which is management, not leadership.”

president Alfred Gottschalk said, “Character is vital in a leader, the basis for everything else. Other qualities would include the ability to inspire trust, some entrepreneurial talent, imagination, perseverance, steadfastness of purpose. . . . Character, perseverance, and imagination are the sine qua non of leadership.”

Moving through Chaos

Leaders are, by definition, innovators. They do things other people have not done or dare not do. They do things in advance of other people. They make new things. They make old things new. Having learned from the past, they live in the present, with one eye on the future. And each leader puts it all together in a different way. To do that, as I noted earlier, lead-

Getting People on your side

Betty Friedan also discussed the idea of leading through voice rather than position. “I have never fought for organiza-

than salary or position. Volunteers do not need contracts, they need covenants. . . . Covenantal relationships induce freedom, not paralysis. A covenantal relationship rests on shared commitment to ideas, to issues, to values, to goals, and to management process. Words such as love, warmth, personal chemistry, are

“I think the first thing one has to do [in setting out to change a culture] is get people on one’s side and show them where you want to take the company. Trust is vital. People trust you when you don’t play games with them, when you put everything on the table and speak honestly to them. Even if you aren’t very articulate, your intellectual honesty comes through, and people recognize that and respond positively.

Organisations can help or hinder

– In *Thriving on Chaos*, Tom Peters says that organizations that succeed over time will have certain characteristics in common:

- A flatter, less hierarchical structure.
- More autonomous units.
- An orientation toward high-value-added goods and service.
- Quality controls.
- Service controls.
- Responsiveness.
- Innovative speed.
- Flexibility.
- Highly trained and skilled workers who use their minds as well as their hands.
- Leaders at all levels, rather than managers.

Leaders are not made by corporate courses, any more than they are made by their college courses, but by experience. Therefore, it is not devices, such as “career path planning,” or training courses, that are needed, but an organization’s commitment to providing its potential leaders with opportunities to learn through experience in an environment that permits growth and change. Organizations tend to pay lip service to

- Special projects are also an excellent proving ground. For example, in the 1980s, PacBell sent teams to set up temporary communications systems at both the Democratic National Convention and the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. In each case, the teams had to invent, improvise, and devise ways to make these temporary systems work efficiently, and they had to do it under severe time constraints. Above all, they had to do it so that PacBell made a profit.

The higher the stakes, the more opportunities there are for learning—and, of course, the more opportunities there are for failures and mistakes. But as we have seen, failures and mistakes are major sources of vital experience. As virtually every leader I talked with said, there can be no growth without risks and no progress without mistakes. Indeed, if you don't make mistakes, you aren't trying hard enough. But as mistakes are necessary, so is a healthy organizational attitude toward them. First, risk taking must be encouraged. Second, mistakes must be seen as an integral part of the process, so that they are regarded as normal, not abnormal. Third, corrective action rather than censure must follow.

Because reflection is vital—at every level, in every organization—and because burnout is a very real threat in today's hectic atmosphere, all executives should practice the new three R's: retreat, renewal, and return. Academia has long recognized the

Forging the Future

In a time of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.

Optimism and hope provide choices. The opposite of hope is despair, and when we despair, it is because we feel there are no choices. President Carter was done in by his “malaise” speech. He thought he was getting real, but we thought he was

6. *Leaders understand the Pygmalion effect in management.*

That's how this group of leaders thrives. That's how they forge the future. What about the upcoming leaders? The next generation of leaders will have certain things in common:

- Broad education.
- Boundless curiosity.
- Boundless enthusiasm.
- Contagious optimism.
- Belief in people and teamwork.
- Willingness to take risks.
- Devotion to long-term growth rather than short-term profit.
- Commitment to excellence.
- Adaptive capacity.
- Empathy.
- Authenticity.